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ABSTRACT

This booklet, prepared by the Wyoming Department of Education, lists roadblocks that impede the development of young people and suggests measures to be taken by the family, the community, and the schools to remove them. Data on youth involvement are given for Wyoming and for the United States on the following topics: (1) dropping out of school; (2) use/abuse of alcohol and drugs; (3) teen pregnancy; (4) suicide; (5) illiteracy; (6) violations of law and institutionalization; and (7) violence. Recommendations are made for local and state level interventions which may lessen or alleviate these problems among school populations. The booklet contains an evaluation form for the reader to complete regarding the booklet and the issues presented therein. (VM)

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Children At Risk

ROADBLOCKS TO ACHIEVING POTENTIAL

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ELIMINATING THE BARRIERS

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Children At Risk

ROADBLOCKS TO ACHIEVING POTENTIAL

ELIMINATING THE BARRIERS

WYOMING DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LYNN SIMONS
STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

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PREFACE

Half of Wyoming's children could be at risk:

Of being deprived of a chance to succeed in this society, economically, socially, and educationally
Of dropping out of school
Of alcohol or substance addiction
Of violence, neglect, or abuse
Of becoming pregnant
Of illiteracy.

To assure success for all children requires the effort of all — the family, the community, and the school. All must help children develop a sense of self worth and confidence:

— to learn the basic skills of reading, writing, computation, and critical thinking
— to develop the values and the habits of responsibility, independence, and citizenship.

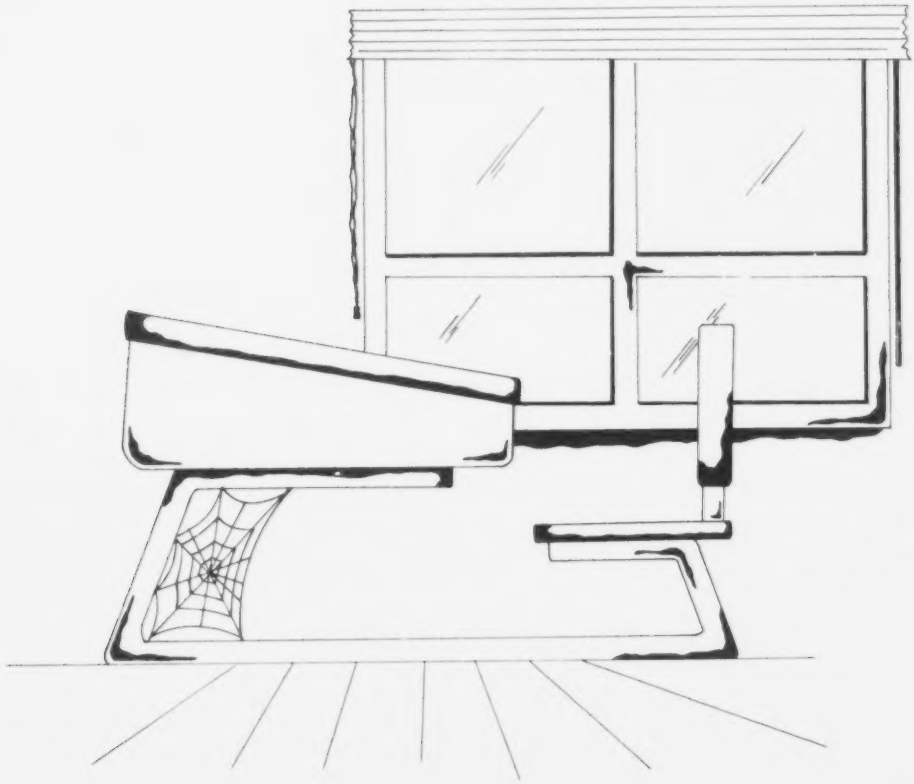
The State Department of Education is committed to success for every child.
Directing its human and fiscal resources to the problems, joining with other responsible groups and individuals, the Department believes that the risks can be reduced.

Shattered lives — or successful, happy ones?
Ignorance — or education ?
Addiction — or health?
Dependence — or self reliance?

The brighter outcome can be assured.

Lynn Simons
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

ROADBLOCK #1 – DROPPING OUT



Students who drop out or leave school before graduating cause economic and social problems for themselves, Wyoming and the nation. Students without a high school education are more likely to be unemployed and, if employed, remain at the lower end of the economic scale. Over 70 percent of the people in correctional facilities are persons who dropped out; the majority of families receiving public assistance are headed by people who dropped out. Leaders in business and industry agree that completion of a high school education is necessary in order to develop the functional skills necessary to get and keep a job and to contribute to the productivity of our state and nation.

Estimates of the numbers of students who drop out are difficult to obtain. Precise definitions are lacking, and student tracking systems are inadequate. Estimates, however, indicate that, depending on the location, 10 to 50 percent of students in the United States dropped out of school. Estimates of the number of Wyoming students who fail to graduate range from 12 to 21 percent.

Students most at risk of dropping out include those from minority groups, those reading below grade level, those from families with economic problems and those whose fathers dropped out. Also included may be students who have been retained, in trouble with the law, with poor attendance records, or who must assume family responsibilities.

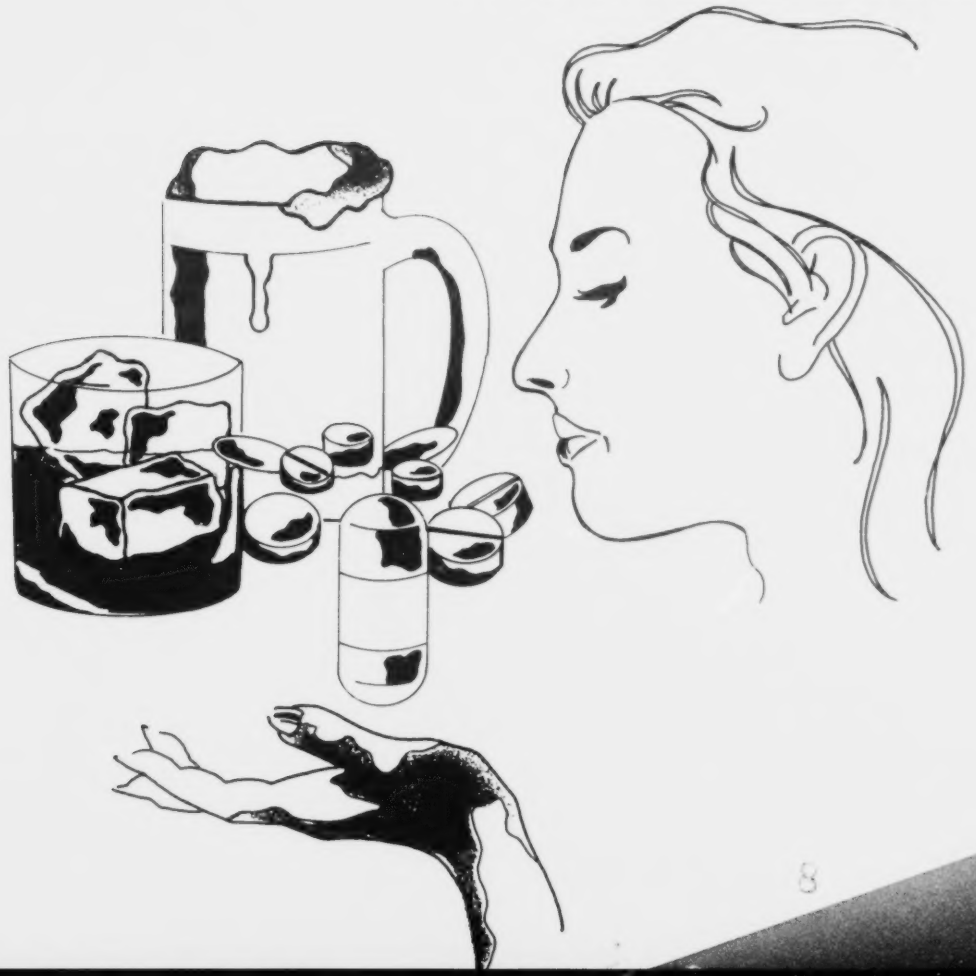
TO REMOVE THE BARRIERS

Emphasize within the family the importance of getting a high school diploma.

Support the local school system in its efforts to work with students who are at risk of dropping out by offering alternative schools and alternative programs.

Support efforts to change compulsory attendance laws to require students to stay in school through completion of a high school diploma or their 18th year.

ROADBLOCK #2 - ALCOHOL & DRUG USE/ABUSE



Drug use among teenagers is 10 times more prevalent than suspected by parents. Sixty-one percent of high school seniors have used illicit drugs, according to national surveys. Marijuana has been tried by 55 percent of high school seniors, 40 percent used drugs in addition to marijuana, 17 percent tried cocaine at some time and 6.7 percent used cocaine in the past 30 days. For teenagers alcohol is the drug of choice and the number one drug problem. According to a 1985 national survey, 92 percent of high school seniors have used alcohol at some time. Sixty-six percent of high school seniors have used alcohol in the last 30 days and five percent used alcohol daily.

Seldom do children begin use with hard drugs; rather the "gateway" concept sees a progression from tobacco to alcohol, then to marijuana and eventually to other drugs. Early use of alcohol is particularly dangerous since it is a strong indicator for the development of problems in school, delayed physiological development, precocious sexual activity and involvement with illegal drugs. The average beginning age for alcohol consumption is 12.5; it is 11.8 for marijuana use. By age 13, 30 percent of males and 22 percent of females have tried alcohol.

Alcohol consumption transcends age barriers, is prevalent at all levels of society and is a rural as well as an urban problem. Motor vehicle accidents involving alcohol are the leading cause of death for young Americans aged 15-19 and account for 45 percent of fatalities in this age group. It may take an adult a year or longer to become dependent, but a child can crash into dependency in a three-month period. Society has yet to come to grips with this mounting problem.

TO REMOVE THE BARRIERS:

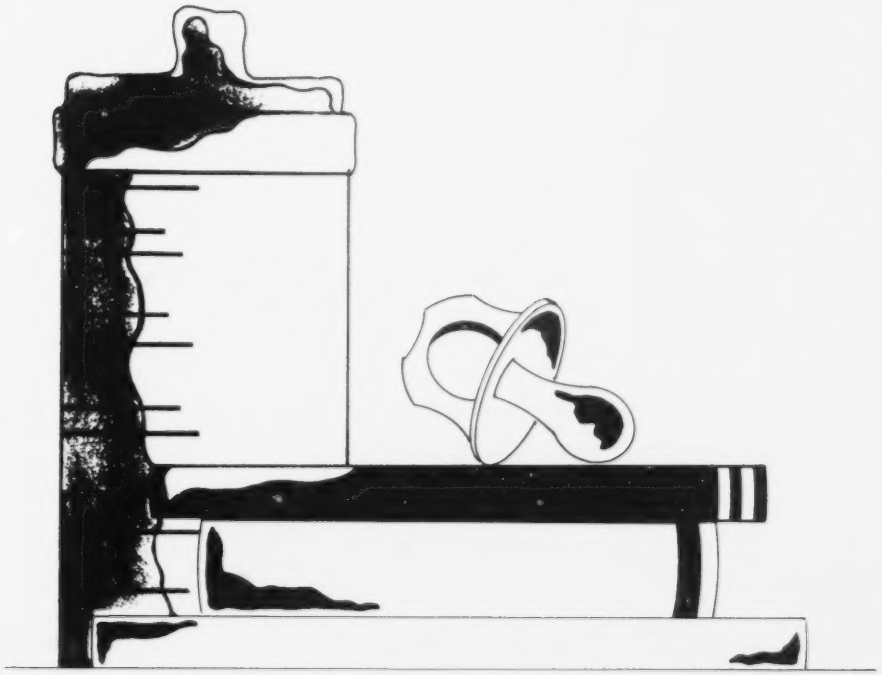
Promote abstinence; there can be no such thing as responsible use of illegal substances.

Support school district and State Department of Education efforts to gather data on drug/alcohol abuse to strengthen programs and develop policy.

Support businesses, organizations and schools in identifying problems and implementing solutions. Examples of community action include such programs as Students Against Drunk Driving (S.A.D.D.), Mothers Against Drunk Driving (M.A.D.D.), Alanon, Ala-Teen and Alcoholics Anonymous.

Support school district efforts to provide comprehensive drug/alcohol prevention programs for all students.

ROADBLOCK #3 - TEEN PREGNANCY



Wyoming has the seventh highest pregnancy rate among 15-19 year olds. In 1985, 1000 Wyoming girls under the age of 20 gave birth. Pregnant teens are less likely to secure adequate pre- and post-natal care. Problems associated with early childbearing include low birth weight, more frequent birth complications, and birth defects. One-third of sexually active teens use no method of contraception and half of them will become pregnant again before age 20.

Each year more than 1,000,000 girls in the United States under the age of 20 become pregnant. Half of them keep the child, 45 percent terminate the pregnancy, and five percent put the child up for adoption. While the abortion rate in Wyoming is ninth lowest in the nation, no statistics are available on the number of teens seeking abortions out of state. The dropout rate for mothers under the age of 15 is 70 percent, 38 percent for mothers age 17-18 and 10 percent for those whose first teen pregnancy occurred at age 19.

Half of the families that receive welfare aid were started by teen mothers. Nationally, the public cost of babies born to teenagers last year was $6 billion; the cumulative cost of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), food stamps, and Medicaid, until these babies reach age 20, is placed at $16 billion.

TO REMOVE BARRIERS:

Public opinion must be established that teen pregnancy is more than inconvenient and disappointing. It is an unacceptable health risk and financial burden.

Encourage the availability of support services for young parents including day care, counseling, skill training and job placement so they can continue their education.

Support the efforts of parents, the church, community groups and the school in seeking to educate children about sexuality, parenting, health, reproduction, the long-range implications of early pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases including AIDS.

Encourage local schools and government to gather data on teen pregnancy including its health and economic consequences and to use this information to shape public policy and improve programs of sex education.

ROADBLOCK #4 - SUICIDE

The 1984 suicide rate in Wyoming was second highest in the nation; 102 people committed suicide in Wyoming that year. Twenty-three of these were young people between the ages of 15-24, as well as one under the age of 15. Over a three-year period Wyoming had 302 suicides: 224 by firearms, 36 by poison gas (carbon monoxide), 16 by hanging, 15 by ingesting poison and 11 by other means. Suicide is the seventh leading cause of death in Wyoming. Estimates of the ratio of suicide attempts range from 10 to 100 for each suicide completion.

The rate of adolescent suicide has increased three-fold in the past 20 years nationally. An estimated 500,000 youth in the United States attempt suicide annually.

The adolescent thinking about or attempting suicide can be characterized as having problems with alcohol, experiencing a tragic death of relative or friend, or strained family relationships, being the first born, or from a single parent home, and feeling pressure for academic achievement. Girls attempt suicide four to eight times more often than boys, but boys will complete the attempt four to five times more often than girls.

The adolescent suicide rate may be two to three times higher than reported, both nationally as well as in Wyoming. The social stigma of suicide encourages cases to go unreported. Some suicides are masked as auto accidents and/or drug overdoses.

TO REMOVE THE BARRIERS:

Become aware of the signs of suicidal behavior and be willing to confront suspected suicidal thinking and discuss tragic losses.

Support efforts to expand and improve counseling programs, especially at the elementary level and improve teaching techniques that emphasize positive self concepts and basic skills. Communicate that "suicide can be spoken here."

Support community and school district efforts to establish policies and procedures, train people to identify potentially suicidal children, and designate a core team to aid these children.

ROADBLOCK #5 - ILLITERACY

One million teenagers in the United States read at only the third grade level; 85 percent of juveniles appearing before the courts have reading problems, as do 60 percent of prison inmates. Forty percent of military recruits cannot understand training manuals written at the seventh grade level. The earning power of adults who cannot read is half that of those who can. Lost economic productivity, unrealized tax revenues, increased welfare costs, and higher crime rates are but some of the problems faced by society as a result of persons with reading and writing problems. Lack of success in mastering these basic skills is closely associated with diminished self-concept, problem behaviors, and high dropout rates.

The ability to read and write one's name was once considered an indication of literacy. Today, experts disagree about the level a person must reach in order to be considered literate. Minimal literacy is defined as the ability to read and write at a level required to function in our society and therefore requires at least a fourth grade reading level. To be successful in a technological world requires at least an eighth grade reading level. Most of those who will become competitive in tomorrow's economic and social arenas will be functioning at much higher levels.

Problems with literacy are not confined to any age, income, racial or ethnic groups. Illiteracy fosters frustration and anger that, in turn, may lead to domestic violence, child abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, and criminal behavior.

TO REMOVE THE BARRIERS:

Support existing programs to help both children and adults who have problems reading and writing.

Provide volunteer assistance to programs, or assist in establishing programs where none exist.

Demonstrate, by example, that reading and writing are enjoyable as well as important activities.

Read to children at every opportunity and stress with them the importance of reading and writing.

Support efforts to fund programs for children and adults who need help in basic skills development.

Support efforts to make literacy programs accessible to all citizens for more of the day and throughout the year.

ROADBLOCK #6 - VIOLATIONS OF LAW AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION

One out of five teenagers will come into contact with law enforcement officers each year. In Wyoming, 25 percent of these will either be jailed for a period of time or be placed in one of the state's correctional facilities or an out-of-state institution. A 1986 study of 149 troubled youth in Wyoming showed 72 percent had been in foster homes, group homes or crisis centers; 53 percent had been in private, in-state residential treatment centers; 32 percent had been in one of Wyoming's public treatment centers. Of the 149, a third were placed out-of-state and another third were placed in the Wyoming State Hospital or a private psychiatric hospital.

Too often , children in institutions are exposed to a broadened range of problem behavior and subjected through threats and intimidation to further risks. Rehabilitation is rare; these youth tend to remain in some type of residential placement and generally experience a progression from less to more restrictive environments. Efforts need to be directed toward prevention. Children who never enter the correctional/ treatment system are less at risk.

TO REMOVE THE BARRIERS:

Communicate clearly the relationship between behavior and consequences by making children familiar with discipline, the courts and penal system.

Support rigorous standards for educational programs in residential institutions.

Support adequate funding for group homes and other community-based programs.

Promote citizenship, including rights and responsibilities in a democratic society, at the elementary level.

ROADBLOCK #7 - VIOLENCE

Juveniles commit and are the victims of violence. In 1982, over 1400 Wyoming juveniles were arrested for serious crimes including murder, rape, robbery and assault.

In 1984, 110 Wyoming residents ages 15-24 died: 56 in motor vehicle accidents, 20 in other accidents, 23 by suicide and 4 by homicide — all forms of violence. Disease and all other external causes accounted for the remaining eight deaths.

Violence also takes the form of child abuse. The Department of Public Assistance and Social Services in 1985 investigated 1525 allegations and confirmed 570 cases of abuse, 372 cases of neglect and 48 cases of abuse and neglect.

One student was murdered in a Wyoming high school in 1985. A whole school was held hostage in 1986. Children in neighboring states have witnessed classroom shootings. Trauma follows these violent acts. Children are at risk during and following these violent acts and need to be able to deal with this trauma.

TO REMOVE THE BARRIERS:

Develop an awareness that violence, both on TV and in real life, affects children and that regulating exposure will minimize this risk to children.

Support school district efforts to provide instruction and counseling at all grade levels on stress and how to deal with conflict in a non-violent manner.

Support efforts to expand school and community emergency plans to include responses to a variety of violent situations that result in trauma to students, either individually or as a group.

WHAT NEXT?

Form partnerships between home, school and community to identify and help at-risk students. Together the problems can be tackled.

Gather statewide information on dropouts, drug abusers, and teen pregnancies, so information can be analyzed and programs can be launched to hold students in school and prepare them for lifelong learning, jobs, and higher education.

Provide drug and alcohol education programs. Early information can prevent abuse. Peer programs that involve students of the same age, parents, law enforcement officers, doctors, social workers, psychologists and ministers form a cooperative effort against drug and alcohol abuse.

Involve parents and others in community advisory councils at the school and district levels.

Expand and improve counseling programs, especially at the elementary and junior high levels, for early identification and assistance to potential dropouts, drug abusers and alcoholics.

Identify and prevent potential suicides. Currently, unless a potential suicide is assessed "handicapped" because of serious emotional behavior disorders or emotional disturbance, no financial help is available for counseling or psychological help. Schools should form partnerships with community agencies to help teachers recognize suicidal behavior and seek parental and community assistance in intervening.

Form alternative schools or programs. Some students need a different environment, different incentives and different instruction that emphasizes how studies relate to life and jobs. Schools, community organizations and businesses need to work together to help these students achieve basic skills and adjust socially.

Raise the drinking age to 21 and increase the penalty for drinking and driving. Parents and educators should work to raise the drinking age and to support organizations and activities such as Students Against Drunk Driving and Parents for Drug-Free Schools.

Strengthen vocational education so that job oriented vocational training is available, either in the high school or college, to all at-risk students. These programs should be cooperative programs with business and industry and provide on-site work experience for 11th and 12th graders.

Extend the use of school facilities. The school could be a community center for learning — to accomodate latch-key children, returning dropouts, adults wishing to improve literacy and vocational skills, and parents/children/teachers together tackling student problems.

Teachers should be specially trained to work with at-risk youth, and extensive guidance should be available as these students move from school to work.

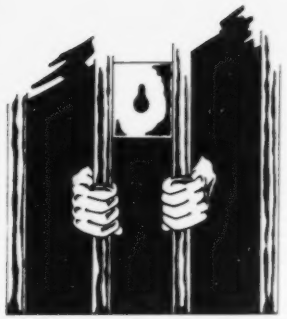
Strengthen state standards requiring schools in each district to plan prevention programs and to individualize the help needed by students.

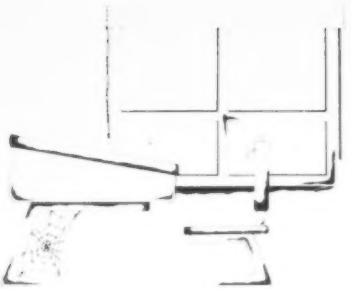
Recognize schools that have developed successful programs for at-risk youth.

Initiate programs for three to five-year-old children to lay solid foundations that prevent later problems.

Build model programs by making available competitive state grants that enable districts to try innovative ways of teaching basic skills and self respect.

Develop a clearinghouse of information that can be used by parents and teachers to recognize the signs of potential problems and provide assistance coping with and helping at-risk children.





WE NEED TO HELP EACH OTHER

We'd like your opinions! Your answers to the questions on the following pages will be used to help reduce the risks for children in Wyoming. When you are finished, just tear off the survey, fold it, attach a stamp and drop it in the mail.

The Wyoming Department of Education

A. As a result of reading this publication, do you feel you. . .

1. are more aware of the risks children face?	**Yes**	**No**
2. are more apt to support the funding of programs to remove risks?	**Yes**	**No**
3. are more apt to get personally involved through...		
a. volunteering?	**Yes**	**No**
b. speaking up for a program?	**Yes**	**No**
c. inquiring about what our local schools are doing?	**Yes**	**No**

B. How serious do you feel the following risks are to the children of Wyoming?

	Not Very Serious				*Extremely Serious*
Alcohol/Drugs	1	2	3	4	5
Pregnancy	1	2	3	4	5
Suicide	1	2	3	4	5
Violence	1	2	3	4	5
Dropping Out	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of Basic Skills	1	2	3	4	5
Criminal Activity	1	2	3	4	5
Abuse/Neglect	1	2	3	4	5
Health/Eating Disorders	1	2	3	4	5

C. Which of the following has the greatest responsibility for reducing the risks our children face? Write a "1" by this group. Which has the next greatest responsibility? Write a "2" by this group. Continue until all blanks have numbers.

_____ Local school board	_____ Parents
_____ The church	_____ Students
_____ Teachers	_____ Business/Industry
_____ City/County government	_____ State agencies

D. Here are some possible things we can do. How much of an impact do you feel each would have in helping to remove the risks for the children of Wyoming?

	Low Impact				*High Impact*
Developing programs on. . .					
positive self concept	1	2	3	4	5
drug/alcohol education	1	2	3	4	5
sex education	1	2	3	4	5
Establishing alternative schools/programs	1	2	3	4	5
Improving the teaching of basic skills	1	2	3	4	5
Increasing school funding	1	2	3	4	5
Strengthening. . .					
school attendance requirements	1	2	3	4	5
state standards for schools	1	2	3	4	5
Raising the drinking age	1	2	3	4	5
Promoting parental involvement and awareness	1	2	3	4	5

Turn page

E. Please fill out the following categories for our use in analysis:

Income Level

____ $ 0 to $10,000 year
____ $10,000 to $20,000 year
____ $20,000 to $35,000 year
____ $35,000 to $50,000 year
____ Over $50,000 year

Educational Level (please check the highest level of education you have obtained.)

____ No formal education
____ Some grade school
____ Completed grade school
____ Less than high school diploma
____ High school diploma or equivalent
____ Post secondary education
____ College degree
____ Advanced degree.

Ethnic

☐ White ☐ Hispanic ☐ American Indian
☐ Oriental ☐ Black ☐ Other

Your Age

___Under 18 ___18 to 34 ___35 to 54 ___over 55

Age of Children Living at Home (please indicate number of children)

_____ Birth to 5 years _____ 6 to 10 years
_____ 11 to 14 years _____ 15 to 18 years

Sex

☐ Male ☐ Female

County You Reside In: _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

Occupation: _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

Thank you !